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ABSTRACT

A study made at the University of South Carolina compared the survival (persistence) rates of full-time black and white students who entered the university as freshmen during the fall semesters of 1973, 1974, and 1975. Survival is defined as the percentage of students in an entering class who return for a second or subsequent years' enrollment at the university. The results showed that black students in this group returned for their second year at a significantly higher rate than did white students. The margin of difference between black and white survival rates actually increased the longer the students were enrolled. (Author/MSE)

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ACADEMIC PLANNING OFFICE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF USC STUDENT SURVIVAL RATES BY RACE, 1973-76

Research Notes No. 33-77
January 1977

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RESEARCH NOTES 33-77

INTRODUCTION:

As many colleges and universities face declining enrollments for the first time in many years, an increasing number are studying ways to improve their holding power of students. The University of South Carolina has developed a reporting system which monitors various aspects of student survival. The purpose of this study is to compare the rate of survival of white and black students at the University of South Carolina over a recent three year period. Additional studies will describe survival on the basis of other variables including sex, residence, housing location and type, etc. A special computer file, developed jointly several years ago by the Office of Institutional Research and the Research Office, Division of Student Affairs has facilitated these studies.

Survival is defined simply as the percentage of students in an entering class who return for the second or subsequent years of enrollment at the University. All measurements of survival were taken during the fall semester. This study does not take into account why the students were no longer enrolled.

Specifically, this study reports a comparison of survival rates for full-time black and white students who entered the University of South Carolina as freshmen during the Fall Semesters of 1973, 1974 and 1975.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Although the literature of higher education contains few documented comparisons of survival rates of black and white entering freshmen at large

predominantly white universities, two noted researchers have indicated that . . ."racial differences in attrition are not as large as might be expected."[1]

Bayer and Boruch found that both white and black women are more likely to drop out after one year of college than are men. However, among women the attrition rates of black students in white colleges is substantially higher than that of their white peers in the same type of college. In contrast black males in predominantly white colleges had a lower dropout rate than did white males in the same type of college.

Bayer and Boruch further report that the "survival rate" of black students appears to be exceptional in light of their relatively low test scores and low socioeconomic background. The authors go on to state that these factors taken together with the high aspiration level of many black students and the exceptional high school achievements demonstrated by many such students, indicate that many institutions should be doing more to recruit and educate black students, particularly those who might otherwise not go to college.[2] The findings of this study which are reported below, tend to support this assertion.

RESULTS:

Table 1 shows a comparison of survival rates for black and white students who entered the University of South Carolina as freshmen during the Fall Semesters 1973-1975.

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[1]Bayer, Alan E. and Robert F. Boruch, "Black and White Freshmen Entering Four-year Colleges." Educational Record, Fall 1969, P. 385.

[2]Ibid., P. 385.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF SURVIVAL RATES FOR BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS ENTERING THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA, FALL 1973-75

Percentage of Students Surviving Who Entered:			
FALL 1973	WHITE (N=2158)	BLACK (N=171)	P
After 1 year (Fall 1974)	75.6	82.4	<.05
After 2 years (Fall 1975)	63.0	71.9	<.05
After 3 years (Fall 1976)	50.2	60.8	<.01
FALL 1974	(N=2133)	(N=213)	
After 1 year (Fall 1975)	74.1	81.6	<.01
After 2 years (Fall 1976)	58.2	71.5	<.01
FALL 1975	(N=2293)	(N=343)	
After 1 year (Fall 1976)	75.0	84.0	<.01

Comments:

1. Black survival rates were consistently higher than white rates for each of the three years studied. Differences between black and white rates following the freshman year were significant beyond the .05 level in each year studied using a chi-square analysis.

2. Freshmen year survival figures have been unusually stable over the past three years. Black survival rates varied from 81.6% to 84.0% while white rates varied from 74.1% to 75.6%

3. Following the freshman year, the margin of difference between black and white survival rates continued and even slightly increased.

Conclusion:

The study shows that black students who entered the University during the three year period 1973-75 returned for their second year to a significantly higher degree than did white students. In fact, the margin of difference between black and white survival rates actually increased the longer the students were enrolled.

Further research is being planned to provide insight into these survival differences.

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